12: Haddon & Start E-4 (no date) 1936 OC6 Iban OC6

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PATTERNS

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The particular fascination of a study of the woven textiles of the Iban lies in their patterns. These are traditional and hereditary, being handed down from mother to daughter, and we have already stated (p. 44) that the *engkaramba* figures may be made only by women belonging to ancient and honourable families.

The motives employed on the cloths include human and fabulous forms, zoomorphs (mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, etc.), phyllomorphs (trunks, branches, tendrils, leaves, flowers, fruit, etc.), material culture (hooks, spools, boats, paddles, ladders, fences, etc.) and finally natural phenomena (clouds, rivers, and the moon), but examples of this group are rare.

Some of the designs are fairly realistic, but most of them are highly conventionalized, so much so that it would be impossible to recognize what they were intended to represent were local information not forthcoming. We have referred in the Introduction to the difficulties we have experienced in the identification of some of the designs.

Hose and McDougall (1, pp. 242–244) state that: "In wealth of decorative designs the Ibans surpass all the other tribes. These designs are displayed most abundantly in the decoration of bamboo surfaces and in the dyeing of cloths. The designs on bamboo surfaces are largely foliate scrolls, especially the yam-leaf, but also occasionally animal derivatives.

"The designs dyed upon the cloths (fig. 61) are largely animal derivatives; but the artists themselves seldom are aware of the derivation, even when the pattern bears the name of its animal origin; and as to the names of all, except the most obvious animal derivatives, even experts will differ. The frog, the young bird, the human form, and the lizard are the originals most frequently claimed. Parts of the animal, such as the head or eye, are commonly repeated in serial fashion detached from the rest of its form. And in many cases it is, of course, impossible to identify the parts of the pattern, although it may show a general affinity with unmistakable animal patterns. One such pattern very commonly used in dyeing is named after *Agi bulan*, the large shrew (*Gymnura*); but we have not been able to trace the slightest resemblance to the animal in any of the various examples we have seen (pls. 131, 132)."